

BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS WITHIN FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES

PREZENTĂRI DE AFACERI ÎN CADRUL CURSURILOR DE LIMBI MODERNE

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Abstract. *The present paper is the result of the concern for developing oral presentation skills of students of economics within foreign language courses. It explains the basics of oral presentation skills in general that apply across domains including those of “business” and “management”. It discusses the three main stages to an effective oral presentation: the preparation, the delivery, and the questions and answers that follow the delivery. The business presenter, like the academic presenter, has to go through the same processes of collecting, selecting, organizing, and illustrating his data, and has to keep in mind the purpose of his presentation, and the needs and interests of his audience. The ingredients of an effective business presentation are approximately the same as those of any other presentation. The purpose of this paper is to help students of economics, but it can be helpful to anyone aspiring to be an effective public speaker.*

Key words: presentation, speaker, audience, business, management, purpose, skills

Rezumat. *Lucrarea de fata este rezultatul preocuparii pentru dezvoltarea abilitatilor de exprimare orala a studentilor de la sectiile economice in cadrul cursurilor de limbi straine. Sunt abordate deprinderile elementare de exprimare orala general valabile domeniilor “business” si “management”. Lucrarea ia in discutie cele trei etape clasice ale unei prezentari orale: pregatirea, expunerea si intrebarile si raspunsurile care urmeaza expunerii. Speaker-ul care face o prezentare de business, ca si speaker-ul academic, trebuie sa treaca prin aceleasi procese de colectare, selectare, organizare si ilustrare a datelor, sa aiba mereu in vedere scopul prezentarii si nevoile si interesele auditoriului. Ingredientele unei prezentari de business sunt aproximativ aceleasi ca ale oricarei prezentari. Scopul acestei lucrari este de a ajuta studentii de la sectiile economice, dar lucrarea poate fi folositoare pentru oricine doreste sa devina un bun speaker.*

Cuvinte cheie: prezentare, speaker, public, afaceri, management, scop, abilitati

INTRODUCTION

In a world dominated by strong competition and increasing globalization, students of economics are aware that, business depends on alliances and partnerships. Future business executives, these students know that expressing ideas effectively and efficiently is the key to success; some of them have

brilliant proposals, but they have trouble explaining them to others. The ability to give a great presentation can be a tremendous career booster, while the inability to do so can keep one on a dead-end path. No wonder managers, whether experienced or new to the office, would like to hone their presentation skills. This paper aims at giving some suggestions on how to make effective presentations. At the same time it offers some ideas, tips and strategies, which will help the presenter become more capable, efficient, and effective in his presentation.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The first step in the preparation of any presentation is the choice of a topic, which should be appropriate for the audience, for the speaker and for the speech occasion. Topic is one of the main aspects of a presentation: content and code, matter and manner, subject and style. Code, manner, and style refer to language and body language. Content, matter, and subject refer to ideas, thoughts, opinions, and information. We can say that topic is the soul of a presentation. In a good presentation we find a perfect fusion of matter and manner, subject and style. If a presenter fails to integrate the two, his performance falls short of being effective. Different students are good at attacking different types of themes. Some students are good at statistical presentations, some are good at analytical presentations, and some are good at powerful persuasive speeches. Students have their preferences, strengths and weaknesses. So, the individual speaker is the best person to know his own interest areas. He may be quite comfortable with certain topics and talk about them with facility. On the contrary, he may not feel at ease with some other subjects. If he thinks he cannot handle a particular area, it would be a wise gesture to tell the organizer frankly.

The next element a speaker should take into account is the audience profile: their age, gender, education level, job type, experience, domicile, religious and political affiliation, their role models, their personality types, and of course, their expectations. Audience profile is necessary and has many advantages. It can help one make good choices in terms of what to say and how to say it. The choice of the language and illustrations will be determined by the educational level, and job profile of the listeners. Audience is central to communication as all communication is targeted at them. We cannot afford to ignore our audience or be indifferent to them or undermine their role. A presenter is a presenter by virtue of their existence and their attendance. In the absence of the listener, the speaker loses her identity as a presenter. The audience will listen willingly if the topic is of concern to them. Therefore, it is necessary to perceive their individual interests and their interest as a group.

At the same time, one needs to have a clear understanding of his objectives. He can grab the attention of his audience and sustain their interest only if the objectives are clear. When the presenter knows his audience and his objectives, he can use a variety of techniques to maintain audience attention: inviting them to participate, exercising their imagination, arousing their curiosity, role playing, stating striking facts and statistics, and telling a story.

It is common knowledge that some occasions are informal and some occasions are formal. For example, a friendly gathering is an informal occasion and a business meeting or conference is a formal occasion. The topic, the style, and the occasion should match with one another. The speaker who loses sight of this

common sense principle projects a poor image of himself. The audience will tend to conclude that the speaker is so much engrossed in himself that he forgets the demands of the occasion. In all probability, such a speaker would turn out to be a big bore. When the presenter knows the nature and type of the occasion, it is easier for him to choose a topic that suits it. The presenter should visit the place of the presentation a day or two before and should familiarize himself with the location.

The next step in the preparation of the presentation is to gather material. The first great source of material is the speaker's own culture. He can brainstorm on the topic and jot down his own ideas. He can recollect his ideas, thoughts, experiences, and observations and look for more ideas in *newspapers, magazines, books, and encyclopaedias*. Fortunately, there is no famine of ideas; they are floating around all the time. One needs to catch them and internalize them, personalize them, and support them with your own experience and observations. Furthermore, the presenter may *interview* some public speaker, specialist or expert, or discuss his subject with his friends, colleagues and family. Yet another source is the *audio-visual library*. He can have a look at his catalogues to identify relevant cassettes/DVDs, view them and select portions, which he thinks will add spice to his presentation. The audio-visual impact will enliven the speech.

The presenter must be well prepared and the information thoughtfully presented and pertinent to the listeners' needs. This implies that the presenter cannot display the bagfuls of material he has collected. He shouldn't be over-ambitious; he should be pragmatic. Minor points can be combined under major ones. Three or four points are easy to remember. Let's remember what Plutarch said: "I do not think him a good shoemaker, who makes a great shoe for a small foot."

All this requires the selection of the material keeping in mind

- (i) the time limit
- (ii) audience interest, and
- (iii) purpose of the talk.

As a result, the presenter has to separate the essential from the inessential. You have to sift through the material to distinguish important information from disposable information.

Thus, the introductory part of the presentation catches the attention of the audience and provides signposting from which they can extrapolate the direction of the speech. The audience gets a clear map of what they will encounter. Here are several strategies for introducing a presentation. The speaker can start with a quotation, saying, proverb, epigram, joke, anecdote, aphorism, story, folk-tale, or a dramatic and controversial statement. He can open the talk in any way that can arrest the attention of the audience. Having introduced the topic in an interesting way, the speaker can proceed to develop the main body of his presentation. An effective body of a speech can be informative, persuasive, or amusing. An informative speech adds to the listener's knowledge; a persuasive talk presents a problem and proposes solutions.

According to the type of presentation, the speaker can develop his speech using various strategies: he can advance his arguments, supply the data, and provide examples. He can quote experts to support his argument, because authority, testimony, quotation, and evidence help him sell his ideas effectively. Moreover, it is a good strategy to support every idea with an illustration that is germane to the purpose of the talk. Being specific, definite and clear, a good illustration expresses the meaning forcefully.

The concluding part of the presentation is also very important. The conclusion should be planned in advance because if the speaker thinks about it at

the last moment, he might end up projecting a poor image of himself.

The foregoing discussion attests to the several advantages the structure of a presentation gives us. First, it draws audience attention and brings things into focus. Secondly, it holds people's interest. Experience tells us that it is difficult to hold human attention and interest for a long time, but structure helps us do that. Thirdly, a methodically presented speech helps people understand the message and perceive the links easily. Fourthly, it makes the message stay in public memory for a longer time. In brief, an organized presentation grabs and sustains audience attention, and achieves a lasting impact.

One may be a very confident, fluent and eloquent speaker, but one cannot make a point as effectively as a picture or a diagram does. A visual conveys an idea faster and better. There are several visual aids that can be used: pictographs, line graphs, photographs, diagrams, bar graphs, charts, blackboard, flannel board, transparencies, motion pictures, and so on. Some presentation aids are readily available to be bought. If suitable aids are not available, then the presenter can use his creativity and imagination to produce those that suit his topic, audience, occasion, and purpose.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After the presenter has chosen the topic, has prepared profiles of his audience, occasion, and location, after he collected, selected and organized his material and created presentation aids he can go to the podium and make the presentation. However, a rehearsal is useful for a beginner or for a presenter who is not fully confident. He can rehearse in front of a mirror or request some relatives, friends or colleagues to attend the presentation and be ruthlessly critical of the content and the manner. He can request a speechmaker, and a presenter to attend his talk. Or, he can do it by himself: record his speech and play it again. The advantages are obvious: practice makes perfect. Rehearsal improves performance. The rehearsal audience can give feedback on pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and organization of ideas, body language, and time management. They can comment on the strengths and the weaknesses of the presentation. They can tell which part of speech was effective and which ineffective. In the light of their suggestions, you can edit your speech, refine the content and language, and get rid of faults in the structure, errors of logic, poor usage, irrelevant examples and quotations, and so on. Furthermore, rehearsal will help the presenter check his timing and reduce his nervousness. Thus rehearsal brings an improvement of the presentation skills through peer rating, self-rating and reflection.

Once the presentation started, the speaker must use all his resources to maintain a grip on the audience. The two major resources that the speaker can handle are *language* and *body language*. Good delivery involves much more than mere fluency in speaking. It includes the effective use of many visual and vocal cues: eye contact, hand gestures, posture, and general physical appearance as well as vocal quality, pitch, volume and rate of speech. Language most shows a man. Nothing renders a man's form, or likeness so true as his speech. Obviously, language plays a very crucial role in a presentation.

Although the level of formality of the language will vary from occasion to occasion and topic to topic, a good public speaker usually employs the familiar language of person-to-person conversation. He uses positive and polite language to bridge or at least reduce the distance between him and his listeners. The use of "I", "my," and "me" has distancing effect; on the contrary, "we," "our" and "us" have a zoom in effect. Thus his talk is personal and familiar like a chat. Everyone understands his meaning, because every sentence is plain and simple. It is necessary to use short, simple words, and familiar examples. A good speaker uses technical language only when it is unavoidable. He uses words that say exactly what he means and uses images to sharpen his points. If his subject is abstract and complicated, he should try to present it in concrete and simple language. Occasionally, he can use sensual images and figures of speech. His main guiding principle, however, should be what Emerson said: "Speech is power to translate a truth into a language perfectly intelligible to the person to whom you speak".

Another facet of communication is body language, which is equally important, or perhaps more important. Let us take the case of eye contact, for instance. Our eyes send messages and receive impressions from another person's eyes. We can see a lot in our audience's eyes. We can read a whole lot of messages - interest, willingness, comprehension, satisfaction, incomprehension, boredom, irritation, etc., because all our souls are written in our eyes. The interchange of looks is the first step toward rapport. If the speaker reads his speech his eyes will be riveted on the text and he will not be able to look at the audience. Eye contact is like a lubricant; it reduces friction, acts as an adhesive and binds people together; it speeds up the listener's comprehension. When the speaker looks them in the face, they understand faster and better. Gestures and facial expressions greatly contribute to the effectiveness of a speech. Nobody would like to listen to a speaker with a stone face. Gestures and expressions help the speaker illustrate his ideas, express his attitudes, and regulate his interaction with his audience. Moreover, gestures can emphasize, highlight, complement or contradict the verbal message.

The speaker's job as a presenter is not over after he has finished delivering his speech. The audience will surely have several questions, which he will need to answer. The presentation will be complete when the speaker has answered everybody's questions. Obviously, not every question will be sensible. Only one in five may be an intelligent question. However, the speaker cannot afford losing his patience; he has to keep calm. Poise is very important, because poise is the ability to continue speaking fluently while the other fellow is picking up the cheque. Asking intelligent and probing questions is an art; answering them convincingly is an art too. The first thing the speaker should do is to welcome the question. If necessary, compliment the questioner on his question. First, say that it is a probing, intelligent, good question and then answer it.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up – the paper points out the various stages in the preparation of a presentation. First, the speaker needs to select a subject of the presentation: it is the anchor of his presentation. Secondly, he needs to be clear about the purpose of his speech: to give a general introduction to lay people, to describe findings to experts, or to engage in a dialogue with the audience. Thirdly, he needs to familiarize himself with the location, occasion, and audience. The more he knows about them, the better. He needs to familiarize himself with his audience too, because his presentation is a joint venture, a common pursuit, and a co-operative endeavour between him and his audience.

For the next phase of preparation the speaker pools his ideas, views, statistics, etc. He needs some incubation period to internalize the information. During this stage, he can test the validity of his ideas, think about them, and look for illustrations to support those ideas. He can present his ideas in a narrative way, in the form of a story. But, his story must be relevant to his objectives.

The presenter will require other resources such as graphics to enhance the impact of the structure of his presentation. It is common knowledge that presentation aids add spice to a presentation. The speaker can use them to demonstrate a process or an event, to add a professional touch to his talk and to make it memorable.

The speaker needs to rehearse the presentation in order to be mentally ready for the job. After the rehearsal is over he can establish rapport and camaraderie with his audience, entertain them, and make them feel comfortable. The speaker needs to create a co-operative climate, be courteous, receptive, flexible, responsive and professional in his approach. He needs to maintain a right degree of formality, control his enthusiasm, display a good sense of humour and move his presentation forward step by step.

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